STREET SPIRIT

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JUSTICE NEWS & HOMELESS BLUES IN THE BAY AREA

A Right Delayed Is a Right Denied

The Struggle for the Right to Rest

"We raise our voices to honor the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and continue to work in fighting for the civil rights of the most marginalized of our society."

— Ibrahim Mubara, Portland's Right 2 Survive, WRAP

by Janny Castillo

With microphone in hand, Bilal Ali, human rights organizer for the Right to Rest campaign, was standing in front of two large banners, one saying, "Black Lives Matter," and the other "A Right Delayed is a Right Denied."

At a direct action for the Homeless Bill of Rights held in San Francisco on Sunday, January 18, he described the draconian laws that the Right to Rest bill will help eliminate. "The laws today that criminalize homelessness and poverty are an extension of those laws," Ali said, calling out the names of the cruelly repressive Jim Crow, Sundown Towns, and anti-Okie laws that have snaked their way across America for over 40 years.

"We are here to let San Francisco know that we will resist these laws. We will resist any law that criminalizes the bare necessities of life activities and the basic existence of our people!"

The Right to Rest Bill, also known as the Homeless Bill of Rights, is making its way to legislators in three states: California, Oregon and Colorado. Advocates for the bills are fired-up grassroots organizers led by Western Regional Advocacy Project.

"Our campaign is now active in four states and acting in partnership with 135 organizations and thousands of individuals," says WRAP Executive Director Paul Boden. The multi-state actions in several cities included sleep-outs, marches, a "poor people palooza" and a film festival.

The San Francisco action, held at the Powell Street BART station, was in collaboration with Black Lives Matter and the birthday of Martin Luther King Jr. Advocates and speakers from various parts of the homeless community spoke about the need to pass the Right to Rest bill now.

Laura Slattery from the Gubbio Project, a sanctuary for homeless people at St. Boniface Church in the Tenderloin, described how the Right to Rest bill is connected to the work of Martin Luther King and the Poor People's Campaign.

She said, "After the death of King, 3,000 people set up tents in Washington, D.C., for the Poor People's Campaign. For six weeks

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"House Keys Not Handcuffs." **A protester at the Right to Rest rally in San Francisco denounces the criminalization of homeless people.** Janny Castillo photo

My Journey from San Francisco to Selma

Bishop James Pike of Grace Cathedral thundered from the steps of City Hall: "I've been there, and friends, we need more bodies down there, more bodies, and especially more white bodies." In that instant, I knew I would go to Selma.

by Claire Isaacs Warhhaftig

In just one instant in 1965, I decided to travel to Selma, Alabama, and march for voting rights for African-Americans who had been disenfranchised for decades in the South.

As I plan my return to Selma this year on March 3 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of this historic event, I ask myself: When did I start this journey, and why? And I recall the discrimination in society that was obvious even to a teenage girl.

I was a senior in high school in 1949. Dad said that since he had business in various places that summer, why not all travel together and cross the country?

First stop: Tulsa, Oklahoma. Riding the bus, I noticed black people were gathered in the rear. This naïve California girl thought they preferred to sit together. Then I noticed they weren't even talking with one another. That evening, I learned that Tulsa had curfew laws. Blacks were prohibited from leaving their homes after 8 p.m. The exception was to work serving a white family, and required a permit.

My next encounter with segregation's ugly visage was in Nashville, Tennessee's train station, with its two sitting rooms. The "whites only" space was reasonably clean, regularly painted and offered comfortable chairs. The "colored only" waiting room was one fifth its size, unpainted for decades, and featured splintered benches. I tried not to imagine the restrooms.

We journeyed on to visit our cousins, Julius and Mervin Blach of Birmingham, Alabama, for our first visit ever. Brothers Julius and Mervin owned department stores in various Southern cities, specializing in men's' wear. The downtown store was later to be seen as an unfortunate background to notorious Sheriff Bull Connor's water-hosing of civil rights marchers there.

Our cousins' wives, Patsy and Lillian, served up hospitality Southern style, day

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The Civil Rights Memorial Mural honors Rev. James Reeb (*left*) and Jimmie Lee Jackson who were both murdered during the Selma movement for voting rights.

Oakland Celebrates the Radical Political Heritage of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Photo essay by David Bacon

OAKLAND (1/19/15)—More than one thousand people marched through East Oakland's African American and Latino neighborhoods during the Martin Luther King celebration this year, making the connection between the radical politics of Dr. King and the Black Lives Matter movement in solidarity with the people of Ferguson and all those fighting for social justice. The following excerpts are taken from three speeches made by Dr. King in the last two years of his life. His call for he radical transformation of U.S. society, and the end of U.S. military intervention in other countries, is as much on the agenda today as it was when he spoke these words.

Beyond Vietnam

REV. KING'S HISTORIC ANTI-WAR SPEECH, RIVERSIDE CHURCH, NEW YORK, APRIL 4, 1967

I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic, destructive suction tube.

We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights, are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, extreme materialism, and militarism are incapable of being conquered.

One day we must come to see that the whole Jericho Road must be transformed so that men and women will not be constantly beaten and robbed as they make their journey on life's highway. True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar. It comes to see than an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring.

A true revolution of values will soon look uneasily on the glaring contrast of poverty and wealth. With righteous indignation, it will look across the seas and see individual capitalists of the West investing huge sums of money in Asia, Africa, and South America, only to take the profits out with no concern for the social betterment of the countries, and say, "This is not just." It will look at our alliance with the landed gentry of South America and say, "This is not just." The Western arrogance of feeling that it has everything to teach others and nothing to learn from them is not just.

A true revolution of values will lay hand on the world order and say of war, "This way of settling differences is not just." This business of burning human beings with napalm, of filling our nation's homes with orphans and widows, of injecting poisonous drugs of hate into the veins of peoples normally humane, of sending men home from dark and bloody battlefields physically handicapped and psychologically deranged, cannot be reconciled with wisdom, justice, and love. A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.

There is nothing except a tragic death wish to prevent us from reordering our priorities so that the pursuit of peace will take precedence over the pursuit of war. There is nothing to keep us from molding a recalcitrant status quo with bruised hands until we have fashioned it into a brotherhood.

These are revolutionary times. All over the globe men are revolting against old systems of exploitation and oppression, and out of the wounds of a frail world, new systems of justice and equality are being born. The shirtless and barefoot people of the land are rising up as never before. The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light. We in the West must support these revolutions.

I've Been to the Mountaintop

REV. KING'S LAST SPEECH, MASON TEMPLE, CHURCH OF GOD IN CHRIST, MEMPHIS, APRIL 3, 1968

The masses of people are rising up. And wherever they are assembled today, whether they are in Johannesburg, South Africa; Nairobi, Kenya; Accra, Ghana; New York City; Atlanta, Georgia; Jackson, Mississippi; or Memphis, Tennessee, the cry is always the same: "We want to be free."

If something isn't done and done in a hurry to bring the colored peoples of the world out of their long years of poverty; their long years of hurt and neglect, the whole world is doomed.

We mean business now and we are determined to gain our rightful place in God's world. And that's all this whole thing is about. We aren't engaged in any negative protest and in any negative arguments with anybody. We are saying that we are determined to be men. We are determined to be people. We are saying that we are God's children. And if we are God's children, we don't have to live like we are forced to live.

When the slaves get together, that's the beginning of getting out of slavery.

The issue is injustice. The issue is the refusal of Memphis to be fair and honest in its dealings with its public servants, who happen to be sanitation workers.

Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution

REV. KING, NATIONAL CATHEDRAL, WASHINGTON, D.C., MARCH 31, 1968

This day we are spending 500,000 dollars to kill every Vietcong soldier. Every time we kill one we spend about 500,000 dollars while we spend only 53 dollars a year for every person characterized as poverty-stricken in the so-called poverty program, which is not even a good skirmish against poverty.

Not only that, it has put us in a position of appearing to the world as an arrogant nation. And here we are ten thousand miles away from home fighting for the so-called freedom of the Vietnamese people when we have not even put our own house in order. And we force young black men and young white men to fight and kill in brutal solidarity. Yet when they come back home that can't hardly live on the same block together.

There comes a time when one must take the position that is neither safe nor politic nor popular, but he must do it because conscience tells him it is right. I believe today that there is a need for all people of goodwill to come with a massive act of conscience and say in the words of the old Negro spiritual, "We ain't goin' study war no more." This is the challenge facing modern man.

I say to you that our goal is freedom, and I believe we are going to get there because however much she strays away from it, the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be as a people, our destiny is tied up in the destiny of America.

Before the Pilgrim fathers landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before Jefferson etched across the pages of history the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence, we were here. Before the beautiful words of the "Star Spangled Banner" were written, we were here.

For more than two centuries our forebearers labored here without wages. They made cotton king, and they built the homes of their masters in the midst of the most humiliating and oppressive conditions. And yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to grow and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery couldn't stop us, the opposition that we now face will surely fail.

The Martin Luther King We Didn't Know

Editor's note: Sister Eva Lumas shared this beautiful reflection at a tribute to Martin Luther King held at St. Mary's Center in Oakland on January 15.

Sister Eva Lumas teaches the community at St. Mary's Center about "The Martin We Didn't Know." Janny Castillo photo

Martin believed that the founding principles of the United States required the creation of what he called "the beloved community" — a society that is not driven by making profits, but one that was built by developing relationships of mutual concern and care.

by Sister Eva Lumas

When asked to give a short reflection on "The Martin We Didn't Know," my first reaction was to wonder what more there was to know about a person whose life had been so public. But, I quickly found that there actually are a number of interesting facts about Martin Luther King that the average person might not know.

For instance, Martin's birth name was Michael Lewis King. He changed his name when he entered the seminary to become a minister. He was only 15 when he entered Morehouse College. And he spent two summers during his college days picking tobacco in Simsbury, Connecticut, to help pay for his college education.

He is still the youngest man to win the Nobel Peace Prize, which he won at the age of 35. Martin gave the $54,000 prize money, as well as most of his other earnings, to fund the ongoing activities of the Civil Rights Movement — leaving him and his family to live what he called, "relevant poverty" which meant that they lived on what they needed and nothing more.

One of the most surprising things I learned was that Dr. King was not always a brilliant speaker. He only got a "C" in one of his first high school speech classes, even though he would later become one of the most brilliant orators of the 20th century. It just goes to show that even the most brilliant people have to start somewhere.

They need to be encouraged, taught and challenged. They need the opportunity to develop their gifts, and they need to keep company with people who can help them place those gifts at the service of their community.

Most people do not know that Martin Luther King was not the first person asked to lead the Montgomery Bus Boycott that would become the initiating event of the Civil Rights Movement. The fact is that the first person asked to lead the movement said, "No," but suggested Martin Luther King because his brilliant oratory could bring a compelling force to the movement. Besides that, Martin was not engaged in the petty competitions among ministers that sometimes leads them to serve their own egos instead of serving the Lord.

What most people do not know or remember about Martin Luther King is that he regarded the injustice shown to Black people to be a symbol of the injustice that could be turned on any people when ignorance, greed, privilege or blind ambition are left to rule the day.

Martin believed that the founding principles of the United States required the creation of what he called "the beloved community" — a society that is not driven by making profits, but one that was built by developing relationships of mutual concern and care. To that end, as Terry Messman has already reminded us today, this led Martin to promote the Poor People's Campaign which initiated an "Occupy Movement" that would bring poor people of all races to create a tent city in Washington, D.C., on the National Mall.

Martin wanted to put a face on the poor, and believed this movement would cause legislatures and common folk to challenge the federal budget that was spending more money on the military than defending human rights.

He wanted to challenge the national agenda that was more focused on putting a man on the moon than sending children to school or enabling adults to have meaningful work. He wanted legislators and common folk to know that migrant workers, maids, miners, tradesmen, factory workers, and laborers of every kind all had the right to a living wage.

Today, Martin Luther King would surely support the Homeless Bill of Rights, but more than this, he would be advocating for communal support systems of education, recreation, health care, decent housing, employment, and a living wage that would allow every person to live with dignity, purpose, direction, and hope. He would be advocating for each of us to do whatever we can, big or small, to dream of a better world, and do whatever is necessary to make it a reality.

The Martin we didn't know is more like the Martin we didn't see — a man who spent a great deal of time in prayer, a lot of time listening to the noble ambitions of people in pain, a lot of time learning how to harness his anger into a driving force that would not be silent in the face of lies, would not be still in the face of injustice, and would not be pacified by simply dreaming.

He knew, and we must always remember, that the measure of our dignity is not our popularity, but our ongoing commitment to keep on trying to do the right thing!

He would want us to know that the value of our lives is not how often we get beaten down by life, but how often we get up to speak the truth again.

He would want us to know that when you labor for the common good, you inspire others to do the same thing.

He would want us to know that the content of our character is not measured by the poor choices we made in the past, but the life-giving commitments we make for the future.

Martin King would want us to know that we can make the world better if we keep an open-heart, a generous spirit, and a firm resolve to wake up every morning asking, "Lord, what would you have me do?"

Today, he would want us to honor him by turning our own dreams into deeds!

Sister Eva Lumas has been a Professor of Faith and Culture and the Director of Field Education at the Franciscan School of Theology in Berkeley for the past 20 years. She has a Doctorate of Ministry degree and is the Cultural Competency Trainer at St. Mary's Center in Oakland.

Street Spirit

Street Spirit is published by **American Friends Service Committee.** The vendor program is run by **J.C. Orton.**

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Refuge in Refuse: Homesteading Art & Culture Project

SOMArts Cultural Center

934 Brannan St. (between 8th & 9th)
San Francisco, CA 94103
February 12–March 14, 2015

Opening Event
Thursday, February 12, 6–9pm.
Gallery hours:
Tuesday–Friday, 12–7pm
and Saturday, 12–5pm

For additional events and information, visit:
http://www.somarts.org/refugeinrefuse
Free admission to Exhibition

For more than two decades, artists, nature-lovers, and homeless people have shared the Albany Bulb, a landfill peninsula on the east shore of the San Francisco Bay. The exhibition **Refuge in Refuse: Homesteading Art & Culture Project** includes stories, video, photography, painting, sculpture, and 3D scans reflecting the intersections of urban planning, landscape architecture, archaeology, art, ecology and community at the Bulb.

Refuge in Refuse opens with a reception, film screening and short talks on Thursday, February 12. The exhibition emphasizes storytelling and cultural works by Bulb residents, who provide insights into a unique ecosystem on the brink of change.

In May 2013, the Albany City Council voted to transfer the Bulb to the State Park system, marking the end of the high-profile eviction battle between Albany officials and the Bulb's homeless residents. The residents were evicted April 25, 2014.

Over a dozen former residents who were displaced are represented in **Refuge in Refuse** as contributing artists and collaborators in the artworks. A digital film screening during the opening event, "Where Do You Go When It Rains?" provides a glimpse of the triumph of the human spirit at the Bulb.

Street Spirit Vendors

The *Street Spirit* vendor program is managed by J.C. Orton. More than 150 homeless vendors sell *Street Spirit* in Berkeley and Oakland. The vendor program provides many jobs to homeless people in bad economic times, and is a positive alternative to panhandling.

Vendors are oriented to interact respectfully with the public. Please buy Street Spirit only from badged vendors.

If you have questions or concerns about the vendor program, call J.C. Orton. Cell phone: (510) 684-1892. Email: noscw@sbcglobal.net

The Road to Selma

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by day. Their country club offered this California girl the chance to show off my Pacific Ocean-honed swimming style. As I climbed out of the pool dripping profusely, 16-year-old cousin Dale and her dry, sun-basking friends cooed, *"Whoa, Cuzin Cleah, yoooo sweeeumm!"*

But serious menace lurked behind this placid scene. A black family had moved in too close to the white enclave, and their new home was bombed.

Julius, head of his local American Legion chapter, spoke out against the bombing. He had not suggested that the neighborhoods integrate. No. He had simply stated that such violence was wrong. For this stance, he was receiving daily death threats. My father kept this from me until we had left Birmingham.

Back in San Francisco, I did my best to offer companionship to Lowell High School's single black student. Daughter of the distinguished, Harvard-educated minister of the Unitarian church, Dr. Howard Thurman, she was determined to benefit from San Francisco's outstanding public college prep school.

The Thurman's tiny home in the Fillmore district revealed a beautiful, tasteful living style within a shabby Victorian in one of the few neighborhoods where African Americans could rent.

Miss Thurman didn't make it to my graduation tea, that 1950's traditional party hovered over by doting aunties and grannies who poured the liquids and served tiny treats. But another black friend, Sylia Baquié of Washington High, accepted. The very next day I was "disinvited" from other Lowell girls' teas.

Relationships between black and white people in those days were tentative, hesitant. But my Mom managed to form social relations at work in the civil service — the non-discriminatory welfare department — with the brilliant and handsome Elzie Wright. Elzie provided my first exposure to a black adult woman with whom one could joke and enjoy intellectual disagreements.

At Pomona College, the only exceptions to the all-white student body in the 1950s were the occasional foreign students. such as G'nai G'nuk, a girl from Turkey. As a remedy, the college arranged a student exchange with Fisk University in Tennessee. The two black students from Fisk attempted to shrink quietly into the body of the college masses.

Graduate school in Columbus, Ohio, provided an entirely different social matrix. Before I had even left San Francisco, the Dean of Women of the Ohio State University office sent me a brochure listing sororities as specifically "Gentile," "Jewish" and "Negro," illustrated in photographs.

Even the local off-campus coffee shop reflected this tripartite divide, catering to each one of these three groups, and woe to anyone who set foot in the wrong territory. Many black students originated from border states like Kentucky to the south. They were unaccustomed to mixing with white people. My only black pal was a UCLA student from Los Angeles.

During World War II, thousands of African Americans from many southern states settled in the Bay Area. Many occupied homes in San Francisco's Fillmore District vacated by Japanese-Americans sent under guard to "relocation" camps "for the duration" of the war.

The Fillmore neighborhood became a mecca for black culture and entertainment,

This March 21, 1965, AP photo shows Martin Luther King, Jr. and civil-rights marchers crossing the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, Alabama, heading for the capitol in Montgomery. (Photo credit: AP file)

yet was considered too inappropriate for white girls like myself to get off the B and C streetcars running through that area.

I noticed that one never saw people of color in clothing advertisements. I reasoned that if black models were seen in ads, their presence might become normal and comfortable in daily life. Thus, newspaper columnist Herb Caen made much of the appearance one day in Liebes' Department Store of pretty young Chinese girls, traditionally garbed, operating elevators. Before this startling development. it was usual for all non-white people to remain unseen in the back of a shop.

In the spring of 1965, news of civil rights struggles erupted in the press and media. The nation roared with anger as they watched people in Alabama brutally attacked by policemen mounted on horses charging with billy sticks and tear gas. The police used this violence against unarmed, peaceful citizens to prevent them from marching from Selma to the state capital in Montgomery to demonstrate for voting rights. The film "Selma" accurately portrays the struggle.

Public reaction was not unlike that after 9/11 in New York, with saturated coverage of the outrage on every channel.

In San Francisco, I joined the protest march from the Embarcadero to Civic Center. It was led by the great orator and liberal Bishop James Pike of Grace Cathedral. From the steps of City Hall, Bishop Pike thundered forth: "I've been there, and friends, we need more bodies down there — more bodies, and especially more white bodies."

So, in that instant, I knew I would go to Selma, Alabama.

My journey began in the Macedonian Baptist Church on Sutter Street in San Francisco. Leaders from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) preached the philosophy of nonviolence and taught us physical self-protection moves. I felt a tap on my shoulder. Seated behind me sat the minister of the Pentecostal church directly across the street. He handed me a small, red, velvet bag, and asked me to present this to someone in Selma, "because none of us can go. Please go there for us." Filled with nickels and dimes earned by San Francisco's janitors and chamber maids, this token was a sacred trust I acquired due simply to my place among the pews.

Our group was led by Bill Bradley, a former army sergeant and local activist. He organized our trip, preparing us to deal with both disapproval and danger. The southern-accented stewardesses on Delta Airlines scowled at us. Entering the old Atlanta air terminal, we were greeted by the whisper, "Selma, Selma, Selma," echoing menacingly around the circular structure. Our canteens, jeans and backpacks had evidently signaled our destination.

After staying overnight in a black church and engaging in more practice in nonviolence, we boarded our bus to Selma. Our five-hour drive led us along a very narrow, two-lane highway with red soil on the shoulders and an abundance of wet, green vegetation, bushes and trees. Passengers new to the South were startled by the reality of signs warning, "Whites only" and "Colored stay out."

I recall one memorable mental snapshot: Two farmers, a man and wife, dressed in overalls, holding a hoe and a shovel, standing side by side along the road's edge. A living enactment of Grant Wood's iconic painting, "American Gothic"? No, not those sour-faced Midwesterners, but a black couple wary of showing any expression, yet curious about these strangers passing by.

We arrived in Selma in the late afternoon, and were deposited directly in front of the famous Brown Chapel of media attention. We got off and heard a man outside shout, "These people, they come all the wa-a-ay from San Francisco! Sa-a-an Fra-a-a-anci-i-isco, folks. Let's cheer them off the bus!" We hadn't done anything, but clearly, just our arrival raised spirits in Selma.

Inside the chapel, organizers assigned our sleeping quarters. The young men would sleep on the chapel's pews. Older people and women were assigned to various local homes. Our hostess, Mrs. Lee, endured a week of nearly 20 folks sleeping on every available horizontal surface in her tidy one-bedroom house. However, this good-natured woman reveled in the excitement of meeting people from everywhere — Chicago, Los Angeles, Cleveland, St. Louis, Denver, Boston, New York.

To obtain food at her home, she, like others in Selma, relied on volunteers who traveled miles away to purchase and deliver it. Activists were boycotting local businesses, including groceries. We scraped up all the money we were carrying to give her. But she was most amused at the packs of trail mix our group carried. She then prepared delicious southern-style food for us.

Each day began with gatherings in a packed Brown Chapel, with hundreds outside on the sidewalk. Speakers from many groups addressed us, leading us in short prayers, welcoming newcomers and thanking all those present. Then, they summed up news of the town's reactions to recent activities, explained the strategies for new actions, and shared the progress on obtaining permission to march.

We were holding our collective breaths, awaiting the word to march. But the leaders surprised us with a new tactic. Instead of massed short marches into town, we would spread out all over town, and "drive the cops crazy" by picking up folks from all over Selma.

I partnered with Barbara. We were dropped off in a quiet, white residential neighborhood. As directed, we strolled quietly up and down that block, always remaining on the sidewalk. Soon we heard from inside those houses, the sound of pounding footsteps, slamming doors, ringing phones, and voices raised, "They're coming, they're here." No one came out to talk with us. The good white folk were afraid of a couple of young women just walking on the sidewalk.

Next, we could hear sirens screaming from every direction throughout town. Eventually, a police car screeched to a halt in front of us. The police ordered us to stop walking. Then they rounded up some black clergymen in their black suits and white collars, who were walking on the next block.

We asked, "Are we being arrested?"

The police answered by ordering us to get into the car. We had to sit on one another's laps, a ploy designed to embarrass all of us.

Deposited at the county jail courtyard, we joined about 60 others who already had been picked up. We linked arms and started singing, "We shall overcome." "Shut up or I'll bash your heads in!" came the instant reaction. The uniformed officer hollering at us was swinging a billy club that reached below his knees. He was the notorious Sheriff Jim Clark of Dallas County.

We were surprised not to be booked, but were instead loaded into a bus and transported to the black recreation center building. It was in poor condition. Soon the single toilet was overflowing. The drinking water was questionable, the furniture and equipment broken or very overused. I rec-

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The Road to Selma

from page 4

ognized a family friend from New Haven, who worked at Yale. A courteous gentleman, he spread his jacket on the cement floor and invited me to "dinner" — a share of his single roll of Lifesavers.

Time passed. It grew dark outside. We learned that we had given the police a lot of trouble, but the police saved money by not booking us into the already crowded jail. To pass the time, we sang and danced and told stories. Teenaged girls in pink curlers presented their school cheers. Performers from the San Francisco comedy troupe, "The Committee," led us in improvisations. Ministers prayed with us. Rumors spread that the Klan might bomb us or that we'd be shot coming out. We decided to stay the night.

Some people felt that the men and women should separate. They had heard that rumors were circulating of sexual misconduct among us, and wished to avoid contributing to such nonsensical notions. So, while the men suffered on the downstairs cement floor, I luxuriated on the green felt pool table in the main rec room upstairs, using my jacket as my pillow. The next morning, a messenger delivered the "all clear," and we marched triumphantly through town to the Brown Chapel.

But there were lighter moments, too. Barbara and I accepted the invitation of some local boys to dance. We drove to the outskirts of town and a huge barn, with dirt floors, great live music, and beer. Folks seemed delighted to see us. And being the first white civilians to enter, we could honestly say we had truly integrated the Selma Sugar Shack!

And then came the announcement: *"We are marching today."*

Violence from the police had sabotaged the first march. On March 7, 1965, more than 600 nonviolent marchers were brutally beaten with clubs and whips by Alabama state and local police on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, during the first attempt to march from Selma to Montgomery. This police assault became known as "Bloody Sunday."

After the nationwide outpouring of negative publicity about the police violence on Bloody Sunday, the State of Alabama finally had been forced to allow the march. On March 21, 1965, the march from Selma to Montgomery began. The police limited the marchers after the first day to about 300. The reason given was the potential for accidents along the very narrow, 50-mile highway.

As we marched over the Edmund Pettus Bridge and out into the countryside, we let out a great cheer. We joked, laughed, linked arms, sang, jogged, and shared food and water. We were so alive.

Yet, there was menace in the atmosphere. The helicopters whirring and buzzing above us caused a breakdown in one marcher, a Vietnam vet. On the sidelines were hundreds of citizens who disagreed with our efforts, and were just staring at us. State troopers bearing rifles and boasting Confederate flags sewn onto their uniforms stood guard along the highway in a decidedly unfriendly stance.

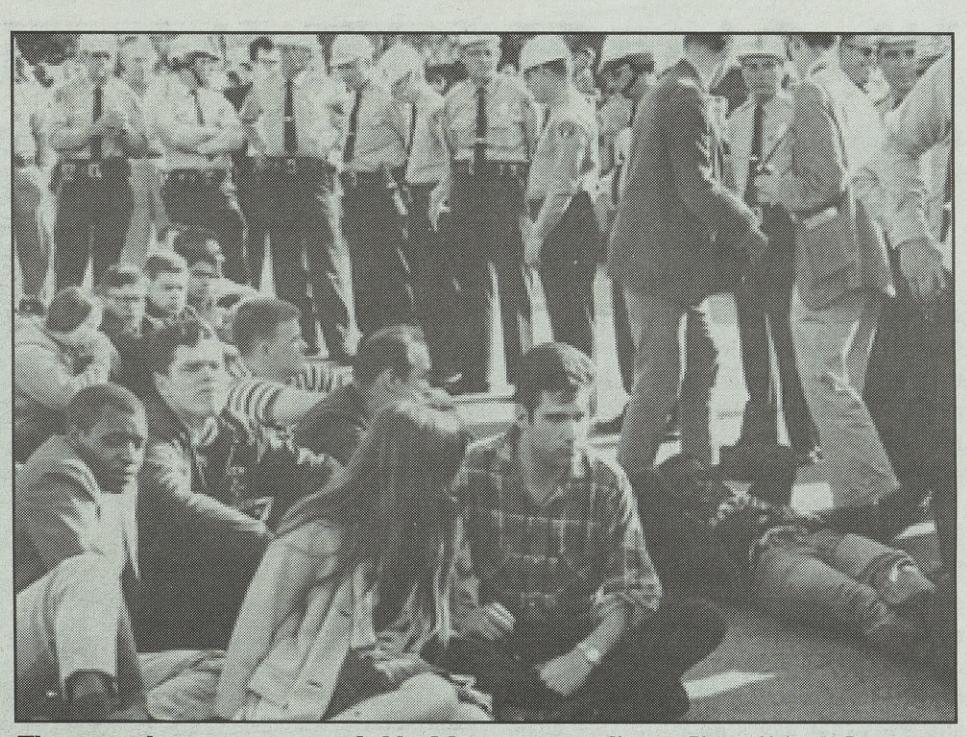
At the end of this long day, we assembled in a large field, but I was unable to spot the train providing transportation back to Selma. Desperate and grubby, I approached a fine limousine with three well-dressed black gentlemen. To give myself courage, I announced, "I'm Claire Isaacs from San Francisco." To which the gentleman in the front seat replied, "I'm Ralph Bunche from New York."

Oops! I had just hitched a ride from a Nobel Peace Prize laureate. Ralph Bunche had won the Nobel Prize in 1950, and had become active in the civil rights movement. He had joined Dr. King in leading the day's march out of Selma.

We drove to the very nice home of a Doctor and Mrs. Jackson. My presence seemed to be causing a problem. It was too dangerous for me to walk or ride to my housing by myself at night. Gently, Dr. Jackson convinced Dr. Bunche that he and his chauffeur must drive me to where I was staying. Reluctantly he agreed.

I could see Dr. Bunche's mood turn dark as we drove through the poorest section of Selma. Asphalt streets were replaced by dirt roads, while street lights and greenery had disappeared from the landscape. At the railroad crossing, we were trapped by the rapid approach of an oncoming train. There was neither safety gate nor lighting there. I hunkered down into the car's floor. As two black men and a white woman in the same car, we could have been attacked.

When we arrived and I dismounted, I screwed up my nerve to ask Dr. Bunche, "Do you think there will ever be a real brotherhood between black and white in America?" His lips tight, he answered, "I'm not interested in brotherhood. I'm interested in respect," and drove off.



These marchers were surrounded by Montgomery police as the Selma to Montgomery march ended in March 1965. Photo: Alabama Department of Archives and History

Because "brotherhood" had been the constant theme of the Selma gathering, I was quite hurt. Over the years, I came to understand the deep meaning of his words. Would there be so many beatings and killings of young black men by white police if respect between races was universal?

Well, it was time to go. I could not wait for the Montgomery demonstration. I had a job and a family at home. Our farewell was a wonderful banquet of real Southern cooking held by local residents for us. With an appropriate speech I presented that little bag of coins to the lady of the house, a community leader.

Upon my return home to San Francisco, I was invited by that Pentecostal church to share my Selma experiences. Garbed in splendid, gold-trimmed, blue satin, the pastor introduced me as "that lady who went to Selma for us." The congregation, ladies in immense, flowered hats and gentlemen in fine black suits, sat expectantly. Interrupted by intermittent shouts of "Praise the Lord," "Say it, Sister," and "Thank you Jesus," I managed to get through my little talk. What an experience for a nice Jewish girl like me. Amen.

I am returning to Selma this year in March. The amazing coincidence is that a contact at the Selma Chamber of Commerce put me in touch with a Jawanda Jackson. During our first phone conversation, I realized that this Jawanda Jackson is the *daughter* of the Jacksons who had been kind to me so long ago. What a revelation! We became immediate friends. She has invited me to stay with her and to share in the special events planned for this 50-year anniversary. These include a kick-off dinner by the mayor of Selma.

As we talked, I finally understood why Dr. Bunche hesitated to leave the house and give me that ride. Dr. Martin Luther King was expected at any moment. Together they were to dine, plan the next day's march, and sleep over at the Jacksons. It was indeed momentous. Now, Jawanda is turning the home into an historic house. I have museum experience, and I am already sharing my advice with her.

After marching in Selma, I felt I had changed. It was not that I became more politically or socially active. I had changed inside. Despite a moral upbringing and good liberal education, I believe it is almost impossible to completely escape the poison of prejudice. It permeates our society.

But gradually I realized I was less likely to feel nervous at the approach on the street behind me of a young black male. I found I could exchange serious thoughts and memories, rather than platitudes, with black women my age. Instead of struggling to connect, I was connected.

No decision is truly instant. For me, the decision to go to Selma was not only to change and repair our democracy, but to change and grow myself.

How pleased I would be to hear from any of the people who made the trip to Selma in 1965. Contact Claire Isaacs Wahrhaftig at cniw@comcast.net

Why Selma Was a Crucial Turning Point for Democracy

by Claire Isaacs Warhhaftig

Why was the 1965 march for voting rights in Selma, Alabama, so important?

We Americans take voting for granted. Yet look at every decision we make in society, from choosing the leaders of our nation, down to the smallest, most informal social situations. Shall we order Chinese takeout or pizza? We nod our heads or perhaps just sense a consensus.

Even when conducting informal affairs, we select a temporary chair of a group or decide the time of the next meeting by simply raising our hands. This form of selection process is far from normal in many countries and cultures, but here voting and other forms of democratic decision-making is a default position, as natural as walking and talking.

At the end of the American Revolution in 1776, we needed to create a formal, legal system of democratic governance, which would also be protected by secrecy. By 1787, the U.S. Constitution had guaranteed the vote to citizens defined as white, male, and property-owning.

After the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments — known as the Reconstruction Amendments — abolished slavery, extended the rights of due process and equal protection to all citizens, and banned discrimination in voting rights on the basis of "race, color or previous condition of servitude."

In the early 20th century, women won the right to vote when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed in 1920. In 1971, the Twenty-Sixth Amendment lowered the voting age from 21 years to 18 years.

The federal government guarantees these rights, but the states, according to the age-old division of powers, regulate voting registration. Many former slaveholding states in the South blocked black citizens from voting by requiring literacy tests, exacting poll taxes, and using intimidation to exclude black voters. After one hundred years of struggle, the march in Selma culminated in the effort to overcome this injustice.

When the civil rights movement achieved its landmark victory with the passage of the Voting Rights Act in 1965, voting increased by the tens of thousands and some of the formerly disenfranchised African American citizens were elected to political office.

In direct response to the marches, the bloodshed and loss of life in Selma, President Lyndon Johnson, who had publicly stated his opposition to introducing any more legislation on civil rights or voting rights, presented his bill to Congress on March 15, 1965, just a week following the Selma March.

Johnson stated, "At times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama.

"There long-suffering men and women peacefully protested the denial of their rights as Americans. Many were brutally assaulted. One good man, a man of God, was killed."

The Voting Rights Act also imposed "preclearance" standards by the federal government upon many Southern states to prevent them from disenfranchising African Americans with barriers such as gerrymandering and early polls closing. ("Preclearance" requires jurisdictions to receive federal approval before implementing changes to the election laws in an effort to prevent them from barring citizens from voting.)

Some states now claim that preclearance is no longer necessary. Yet, in this new century, North Carolina passed laws to eliminate early voting, same-day registration and out-of-precinct voting. These methods have been particularly useful to African American voters who often opted to complete all steps in one day.

The Supreme Court has tended to look favorably on such changes. But watchful people are concerned that alterations such as these weaken the original intent of the Voting Rights Act and could lead to further infringements on the freedom to vote.

By committing ourselves to vigilance in safeguarding our voting rights, the spirit of Selma will inspire us, and ensure that the March for freedom goes on.

Working Hard in America's Twilight Economy

by Don Santina

It's dark not long after five o'clock these winter days and the temperature drops quickly. In downtown Oakland, I watch the office buildings disgorge their daily inhabitants and with their coats wrapped tightly around them, they scurry toward parking lots, bus stops and BART stations on their way home to residences in the city or out in the suburbs of Orinda and Danville.

Over in the west side of town, gleaners hustle toward the recycling center on Peralta which will pay them cash for their collected goods. They push and pull their rusty supermarket carts filled with bottles, cans and odd goods toward the building before the steel rollup door rumbles down and ends that day's possibility of cash transactions.

"Jeez, I thought it was Saturday," Harry said to me on a Friday morning. "I have to move faster cause they close earlier on Saturday."

Harry is a skinny man in his early 50s who has lung problems. His SSI payments do not meet his needs, so he's on the street daily collecting whatever can be redeemed at the recycling center. He wears one knit glove and one leather glove because that's all they had in the free clothes bin at a nearby church. By the late afternoon he will have covered quite a few miles on foot and then push his cart down to Peralta for the payoff: $1.59 a pound for cans, 10 and one-half cents a pound for glass.

"A lot of folks in the neighborhood know me and leave their stuff out for me, but it's still hard. Now it's dark in the morning *and* the afternoon," he laughed. One of his best "clients" is a bar that leaves empty beer bottles out in the back alley.

The Minh family used to work the Oakland hills but they've disappeared. During the night before garbage collection day, the middle-aged husband-and-wife team hiked up and down the steep streets, picking into the recycling bins on the sidewalks mainly for aluminum cans.

By dawn they carried full garbage bags of cans suspended over their shoulders on bamboo poles down to Broadway. Upon finding a level concrete area, they squashed the cans flat with their feet and walked the more manageable burden to a buyer five miles away.

This hardworking couple pick up a huge amount of recycled material on their travels through the East Bay. Amir Soltani photo

Jamie Dimond, the head man of JPMorganChase, made over $9,000 an hour during the time his company committed numerous financial crimes, including stealing people's homes and wrecking the economy. On a good day, Robert the gleaner makes about eight dollars.

Apparently the gentry in the hills became overheated about the threat of ID theft, so private patrols and idle cops ran the Minhs and others like them out of those neighborhoods.

Throughout the history of agriculture, gleaners were allowed to pick up the leftovers in a field that had already been harvested. In many cases, the gleaners were women, scrambling to keep their families fed in societies where the balance of power and land ownership was held by force by a small privileged few.

One of the shortest books in what Christians refer to as the Old Testament is the story of Ruth, a gleaner. Ruth was an impoverished widow who became a gleaner to survive, "so she gleaned in the field until even and beat out that she had gleaned ... and she took it up and went into the city."

In the New Testament, Jesus of Nazareth and his followers also practiced gleaning in their travels. Mark the evangelist wrote that Jesus "went through the corn fields on Sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn." When accused by the Pharisees of violating the law, Jesus replied, "have ye never read what David did when he was hungered, he, and they that were with him?"

Li-Hua is an ancient little woman who works the parking lots of the fast food outlets, restaurants and grocery stores around Lake Merritt. Her oversize gloves almost reach to her elbows, and she pulls behind her one of those folding shopping carts that other people take to the market. She wears a miner's light on her beanie which provides her an advantage in discovering aluminum treasures before daylight and other gleaners arrive.

Robert is a Gulf War veteran who gets around on an old one-speed bike. Robert has a sense of style and design. He built a trailer onto the bike to carry the goods he collects around the Kaiser Hospital neighborhood and gas stations within a one-mile radius. Robert was able to score a few cans of spray paint so he could paint his rig black and gold. It looks good.

"I worry about that judge, man," Gregory told me. "You tell him I'm staying clean."

I read somewhere that Jamie Dimond, the head man of JPMorganChase, made over $9,000 an hour during the time his company committed numerous financial crimes, including stealing people's homes and wrecking the economy.

However, today, the talking heads on network and cable television proclaim that the "economy is back," and stronger than ever. The stock market continues to climb; business is booming.

On a good day, Robert the gleaner makes about eight dollars.

Don Santina can be reached at lindey89@aol.com. His enovel, *A Prize for All Saints*, features a one-armed veteran suffering from PTSD.

Poor Economy Leaves One in Five Children Needing Food Stamps

by Lynda Carson

Oakland — On January 20, President Barack Obama gave the State of the Union address and focused mainly on the middle class, while apparently abandoning the needs of the poor. With one in five children currently needing food stamps to survive in America, the great recession is far from over, and the federal minimum wage needs to increase to become a living-wage all across the nation.

In early February, the Obama administration is expected to submit its 2016 federal budget to Congress and the stage is being set for the Democrats and Republicans to join together again for another attack on the safety net and Social Security, in the name of sequestration and austerity. This ongoing attack on the poor is happening when millions of children in our country are going hungry.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau's annual Families and Living Arrangements report released on January 28, 2015, the number of children receiving food stamps remains higher than it was before the so-called great recession in 2007.

The rate of children living with married parents who receive food stamps has doubled since 2007. During 2014, an estimated 16 million children, or about one in five, received food stamps compared with the roughly 9 million children, or one in eight, that received food stamp assistance before the so-called great recession began.

During 2013, the average monthly food stamp benefit for one individual in California was $151.44. And during 2011, in California's 13th Congressional District, Congresswoman Barbara Lee's district, 11,899 households received food stamps, including 16 percent of households with one or more people 60 years or older, and 76.8 percent of households with children under 18. Around 46.6 percent of the households income was below the poverty level, with the median income around $27,441.

The latest report also reveals that of the 73.7 million children in the United States, 10 percent live with a grandparent (7.4 million), 79 percent live with at least one sibling (58.5 million), 15 percent have a stay-at-home mother (10.8 million), and 0.6 percent have a stay-at-home father (420,00). At least 38 percent of the children under 18 have at least one foreign-born parent (28.3 million). Additionally, the share of children who live with one parent only has tripled since 1960, from 9 percent to 27 percent.

Less than half (48 percent) of households today are married couples, compared to 76 percent that were married in 1940. In 2014, the median age men got married was 29, and the median age for women was 27, compared to age 24 for men in 1947, and age 21 for women that same year. Records also reveal that presently 36 percent of men age 30 to 34 have never been married, and that, on average, married couples have more children than either single mothers or fathers.

Lynda Carson may be reached at tenantsrule@yahoo.com

Art by Kaethe Kollwitz Lithograph, 1924

A Right Delayed Is a Right Denied: *The Right to Rest*

> **"You can't criminalize people for being people. It's a human dignity thing!"**
>
> — Gwen Austin, BOSS

from page 1

they were there." King felt that we needed to focus more on addressing the needs of the poor. She added, "And that's what we are doing today."

"You can't criminalize people for being people. It's a human dignity thing!" said Gwen Austin, community organizer from Building Opportunities for Self-Sufficiency, a WRAP member organization. "We are behind this (the Right to Rest Bill) 1000 percent!"

Youth are often harassed and traumatized on the streets. Shira Noel, an organizer from the Homeless Youth Alliance in San Francisco, described the drop-in center they had created to provide youth a refuge from the streets. "It was a space for kids by the kids," she explained. But this badly needed refuge for low-income youth met an ill-fated end.

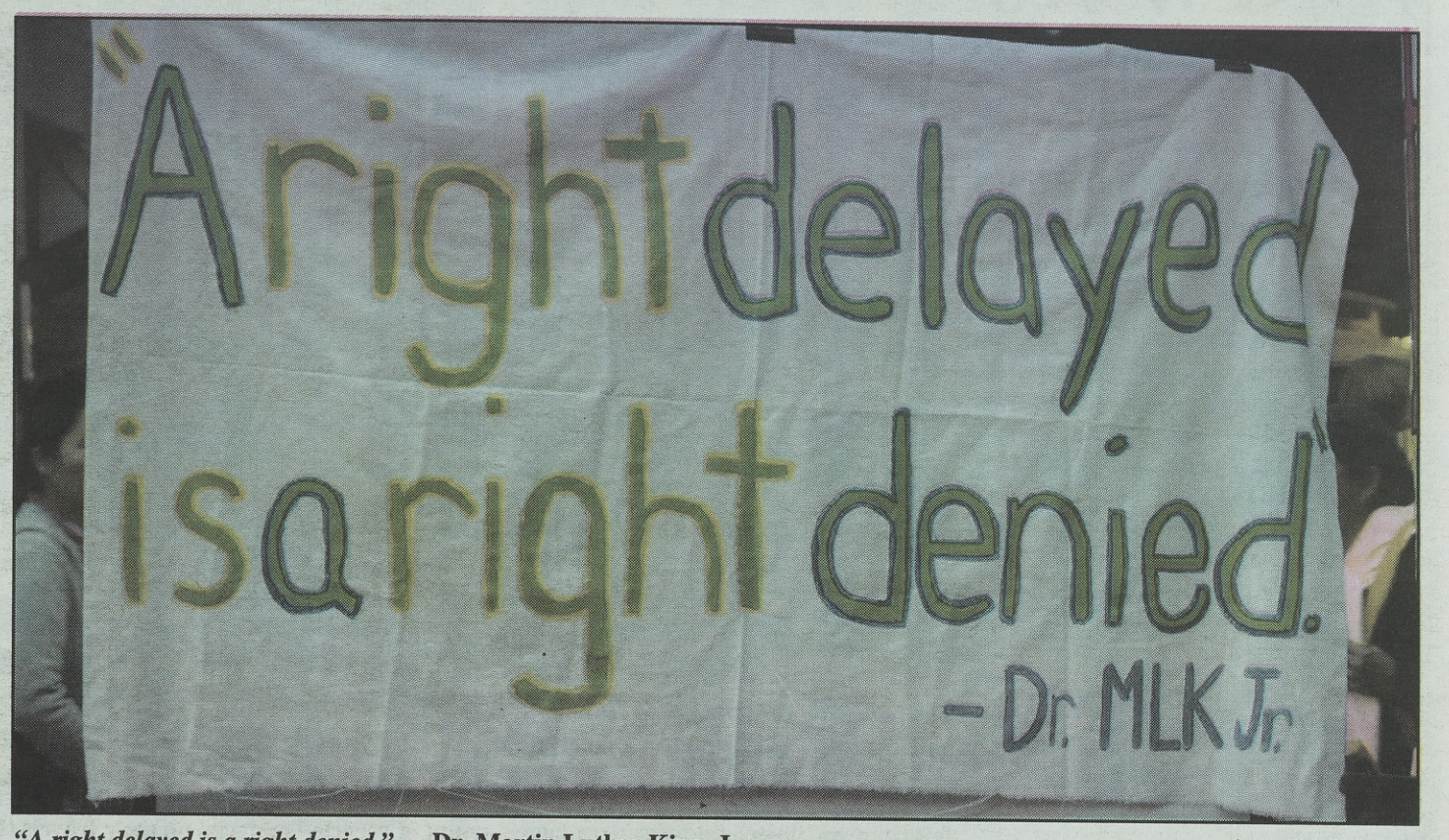
"After 12 years, in 2013," Noel said, "we closed the doors of our drop-in center, not because we had no money, but because the building owners saw a trend in San Francisco. They went after a different class of tenants with more money."

Noel also shared that many of the young people who end up on the streets are escaping abusive or neglectful homes, while others have been abandoned. A startling statistic is that almost half of our street youth identify as LGBT.

"Gentrification and anti-homeless laws make their survival a lot tougher," Noel said. "Despite it all, they are still here — and rightfully so."

After being turned down by landlords 38 times, the street youth drop-in center is still looking for a home. At one point, they had set up services on the sidewalk in front of their old building to help the youth.

Woods Ervin of the TGI Justice Project in San Francisco, shared his experiences. "We struggle with access to restrooms and shelters," he said. "We regularly experience criminalization on the streets by police. Fighting for the Right to Rest bill will give us more access to things we need and deserve — the ability to walk down the street without harassment, to have housing that works for us and to not be locked up or harmed by police."



***"A right delayed is a right denied."* — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** Janny Castillo photo

Anti-homeless laws result in increased instances of unnecessary incarceration. Nicole Deane from Critical Resistance spoke directly to this issue: "Most of the folks that are locked up in San Francisco jails are pre-trial. They are there because they cannot afford bail, which means the city locks up people because they are poor."

According to Eric Ares, an activist with Los Angeles Community Action Network, "Recent court rulings have shown that these types of laws are not only immoral and unjust, but illegal. They do not stop crime, but rather punish people for being poor and homeless." Ares went on to say, "Cities are not going to ticket their way out of homelessness. Housing is the only solution."

Paul Boden, the final speaker at the rally, roused the crowd as he shared the central theme of the Right to Rest campaign. "You (speaking to city officials) will *not* continue to criminalize poor people, day laborers, people of color, people that live in SRO hotels that hang out on the sidewalks in front of their own home! Houseless people! We have campaigns running in four states to stop criminalizing: Sitting! Standing! Eating! Sleeping! And who the hell doesn't sit, stand, eat and sleep!! The people writing these laws do that, the people enforcing these laws do that!"

Speakers at the Right to Rest rally called for an end to police harassment of homeless people and youth forced to live on the streets. Janny Castillo photo

WRAP's Right to Rest Days of Action have taken place in San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, Los Angeles, Sacramento, Chico and other cities. WRAP stands in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement and all groups fighting unjust, violent law enforcement.

The movement has just begun.

Janny Castillo is the Hope and Justice Coordinator at St. Mary's Center in Oakland.

Contact: jcastillo@stmaryscenter.org. Visit the website at www.stmaryscenter.org

Right to Rest Campaign

Engage, Volunteer, Donate.

See www.wraphome.org

To get involved in the Movement to pass the California Right to Rest Bill, contact Jonathan Lopez of the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

Phone: 415-621-2533.

Email: wrap@wraphome.org

Struggling on the Streets Without the Right to Rest

Story by Janny Castillo

Lucy is 76 years old, and she is way past tired. Years of living on the streets have taken an irreparable toll on her. She slowly walks down a busy downtown street in San Francisco.

With three plastic bags in one hand, two in the other, she wobbles as she walks, concentrating on shifting her weight to lessen the pain in her arthritic knees.

Lucy has a large, stained, duffel bag swung over her shoulder filled with, among other precious things, her medications and her paperwork on her Social Security case. Can't go anywhere without that, no way.

Head bent and shoulders hunched, she tries to stay out of the way of people walking around her. With no money, she walks where she needs to go. Today she walks 15 long blocks from the alley where she felt safe enough to sleep in last night.

Lucy was making her way to St. Anthony's to eat and to ask a staff person to call Social Security again. The pain in her back and legs is excruciating. She needs to sit down and take a break soon.

She walks by several blocks of people-filled benches and bus shelters. She can't go any further, so she lowers herself to sit down on the sidewalk in front of a coffee shop. She whispers softly to herself, "Just for a minute … just for a minute."

After two minutes, her head slips down onto her shoulder as she falls into an exhausted sleep.

Lucy is abruptly awakened by a young man in a police uniform, poking at her and telling her she can't sit here, telling her to move on.

Paul Boden called on city officials to stop criminalizing poor and homeless people for sitting, standing, eating and sleeping. Janny Castillo photo

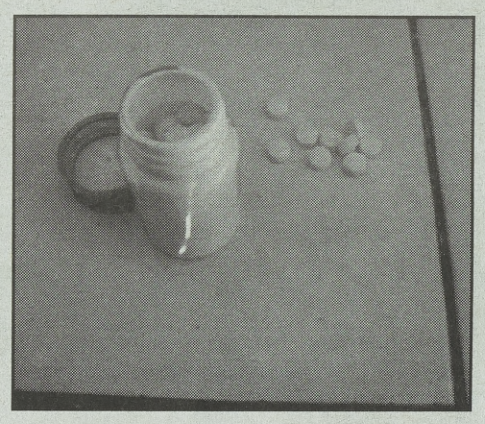
Frightened, she struggles to apologize. "Sorry, sorry," she says. Fighting the pain in her knees and a sense of deep shame, she pulls herself up to her feet.

She picks up her bags, slings the heavy duffel bag over her shoulder and continues to walk down the street of a city that pays attention to her only when they do not want to see her.

A New Wonder Drug for a Brave New World

His mother said, "Something is very wrong with you. Go in the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror!"

Science fiction by Jack Bragen



The new drug could make psychiatric patients fully manageable — at a cost.

Experts had invented yet another new medication, and they predicted that this could be "the medication of medications" -- something that would make psychiatric patients 100 percent manageable. They dubbed it the U Drug.

Its chemical name was so long as to be nearly unpronounceable, and they had not yet arrived at a good commercial name suitable for such a spectacular drug.

The U Drug still needed to be tested. Yet it proved to be next to impossible to find volunteers who would willingly allow themselves to be tested on this drug. It had a particular side-effect that was so undesirable that no one would voluntarily take the U Drug.

The company knew about this side-effect but believed psychiatrists would prescribe it anyway, at least to those psychiatric clients who regularly made trouble.

Enter Jonathan Baxter, a 25-year-old man who was assigned to the study. Baxter had gone off his medications several times and had been written up in his medical records as being uncooperative, "intolerable" and argumentative.

Mental health workers had grown tired of arguing with him. So they put Baxter on the U Drug. And they somehow failed to inform Baxter of this fact.

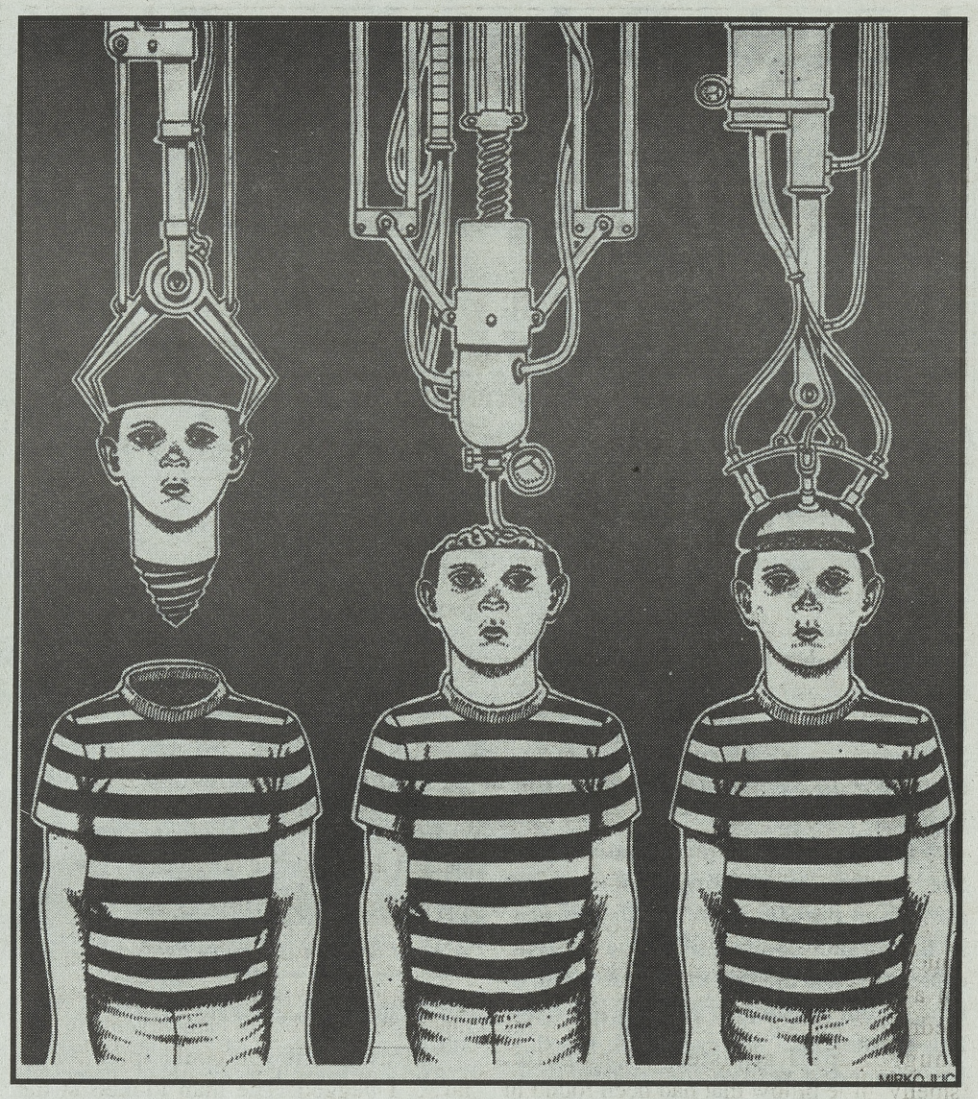
One morning, as Jonathan was eating breakfast, his mother Dorothy sat across from him, and he saw the look on her face.

"Johnny!" cried his mother. "Oh no! Oh God, no! Something is wrong!"

Jonathan replied, "Don't worry about it, mom, everything's fine." He was unperturbed.

Jonathan's mother said, "No! Something is very wrong with you. Go in the bathroom and look at yourself in the mirror!"

At that point, Baxter obediently stood up from his chair and walked into the bathroom. He looked at himself in the mirror and realized that he was badly disfigured. His facial disfigurement was nearly indescribable, and it was clear why his mother had become so distressed.



Art by MIRKO

"Don't worry about it, mom," he said through the open door of the bathroom.

He wasn't upset at all, even though obviously something horrible was happening to him.

"Son, why aren't you upset?"

"I don't know why, mom, I'm just not." He paused. "Why am I not upset?" he wondered.

In the three weeks prior to this incident, Jonathan's argumentativeness had evaporated, and his mother as well as his counselors were impressed by the progress he was making.

"I'm calling the hospital," said Jonathan's mother.

"Don't bother," said the young, disfigured man. "I'm okay with it," he said.

Rx for Shortened Lives, Ruined Health, Damaged Minds

by Jack Bragen

Having been involved in the outpatient mental health treatment system for more than 30 years, I have had a chance to observe the outcomes of a number of people over a period of decades. I have seen a troubling pattern of shortened lives, ruined health and damaged and disabled minds.

For someone who begins experiencing mental health issues in his or her young adulthood, employment is like the Holy Grail. However, at some point in a mentally disabled person's progression, it is likely that employment efforts will go out the window.

Persons diagnosed with mental illnesses have the cards stacked against them if they would like to work and make a living, as they see other, unimpaired people doing. Managers of companies have a tendency not to hire a mentally ill person unless it is for a job emptying the trash.

Even the Americans with Disabilities Act may not afford much protection. I once saw on a business website that ADA cases where there is mental illness involved are generally dismissed. Thus, there is no legal mandate for hiring someone with mental health issues. Most employers are not going to take a chance on us.

Furthermore, a college education is generally a prerequisite for decent jobs or careers. Since people with mental illness may become ill in their late teens or early twenties, they often will be unable to complete their college education.

The serious side-effects of medications are another factor mentally ill people are up against. The effects of medication over a period of years or even decades will often leave a person unable to work in a physical job.

Thus, in a mentally ill person's life, at some point they may have to throw in the towel concerning employment. And then they are forced to live on a fixed income, and are likely to be forced to live in an institutional-type housing situation.

And yet, at the same time, individuals, as well as society as a whole, have a tendency to punish us for not having a job. Examples of this include the social discrimination we experience. Another example includes the commonly held expectation that we remain poor.

I have seen my mentally ill peers deteriorate over time. In some instances, they seem to disappear and never return. This is analogous to becoming an "unperson" in George Orwell's *1984*.

A counselor once commented on my nice shirt, implicitly questioning where I got the money for it. Another person in a position of authority asked me how I was able to afford cigarettes. In reality, my parents and my wife's parents help us with some of our expenses which are not related to food and shelter. In addition, I am responsible with the meager amount of money I have.

But I had to ask myself what other group of people in our society would be questioned so closely about possessing a shirt or cigarettes.

People seem to disappear

I have seen my mentally ill peers deteriorate over time. In some instances, they seem to disappear and never return. This is analogous to becoming an "unperson" in George Orwell's novel, *1984*.

In other instances, when I've caught a glimpse of someone 10 or 20 years after I first saw that person, I often find to my horror that such a person has become crippled or badly deteriorated physically — usually due to their medication, or due to other harsh factors that a mentally ill person has to undergo.

In my case, I have needed to put out a lot of effort against the tendency to lose ground both physically and mentally. I have developed severe agoraphobia, I have gained an unhealthy amount of weight, and I am oversensitive to the effects of stress. Still, in my case, I am better off than a number of people with mental illness, even though I continue to have a lot of problems.

Poor housing and poor health

Due to cuts in benefits, mentally ill people must often live under somewhat harsh conditions in our older age. We may only be able to afford the most undesirable of housing situations.

We are likely to have to get by without a car. Since we are forced to rely on the bus system for our daily transportation, we must be prepared to withstand the effects of the weather because, at least in Contra Costa County, wait times for buses are frequently an hour or longer.

I have seen the effects on people of drug-induced diabetes over time. Frequently, such a person must wear a dressing on their feet and cannot wear regular shoes. They may appear obviously unhealthy, may have lost a number of teeth, and may have trouble performing even the simplest of tasks due to their physical impairment.

Many people with mental illness who may have once had a normal or even above-average I.Q. have lost a lot of ground mentally. Mental health treatment practitioners with their condescension tend to automatically assume that they are mentally superior to those they treat.

This perception becomes prophetic when, due to the effects of the illness and the medication, a mentally ill person may eventually become as mentally impaired as treatment practitioners assume we are. Plus, if practitioners are able to convince us that we are unintelligent, the mind tends to follow this rule and mental impairment is induced by power of suggestion.

The mental health treatment system has a long history of subjecting mental health consumers to hazardous treatments such as electroshock therapy and antipsychotic drugs that have extremely damaging long-term effects on the mind and body. Every few years, powerful new neuroleptic drugs are prescribed before the full range of their mind-damaging side effects are fully known.

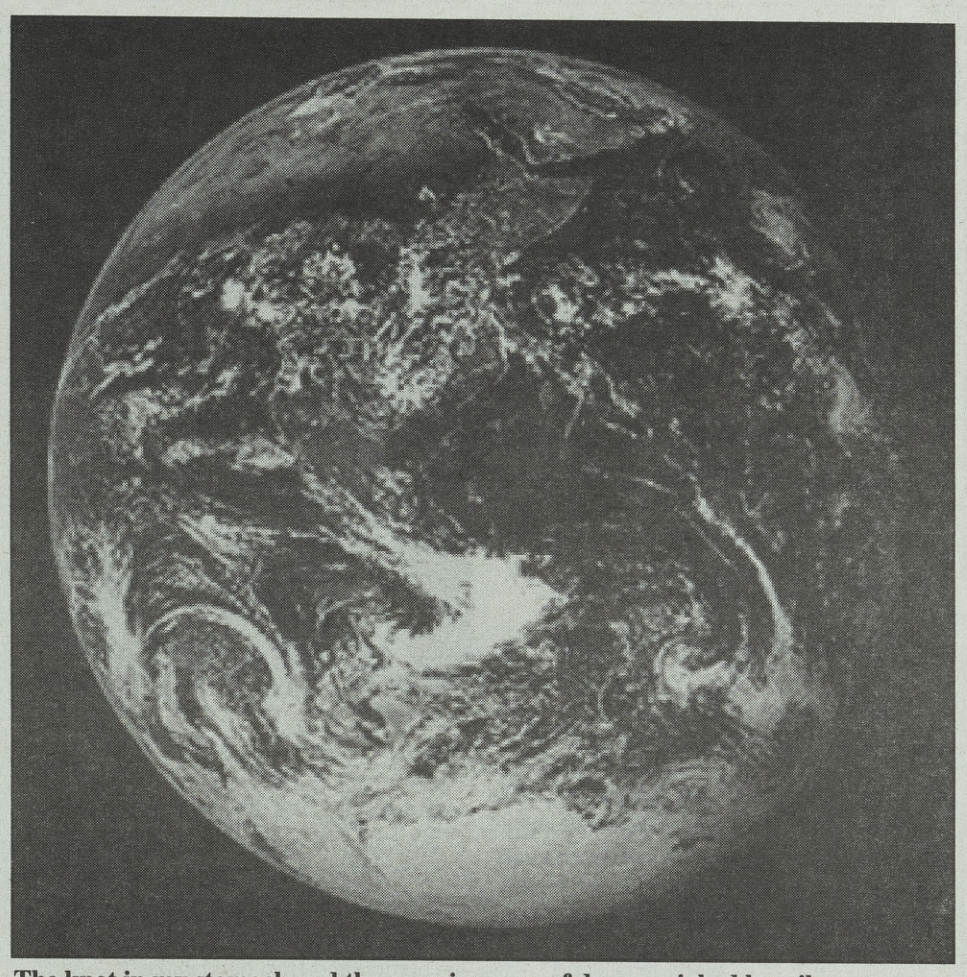
Powerful drug lobbies

In many cases, the powerful corporate lobbying efforts of psychiatric drug companies have convinced the medical establishment and the FDA to look the other way while they essentially experiment on mentally disabled people without our knowledge or consent. This is the moral equivalent of what was done with the Tuskegee airmen.

When people are diagnosed with mental illness, whether it has some basis in fact or not, they are branded for a lifetime of misery — and sometimes it is a short lifetime. Despite mental health practitioners and others insisting that we can't do anything, it is important that we remain determined to do something in our lives that serves our own best interests, and gives us a better chance to survive.

Lost and Homeless Among the Stars

I looked up and saw the Milky Way. I wondered if there were homeless people on planets that circled those stars. I wished I could go to some other planet, one with kinder people living on it, where there was always enough to eat.



The knot in my stomach and the consciousness of doom weighed heavily upon me, and I felt like it was the end of the world. I wished I could go to some other planet.

Short story by Jack Bragen

"When I die, or after I die, I want to look back at my life and see that I ate that cookie, I drank that vodka, I made love to that woman. I did not shy away from living because of the petty fear that death might come sooner. Yes, I got into a fistfight with that bully, and it doesn't matter so much that I was knocked down — at least I took him on. I didn't run like a coward. Yes, I did do things wrong, I did plenty wrong. But I lived, man, I lived."

And at that, the aged man's speaking quickly degenerated into drunken babble. In a little while, he was asleep in his bedroll. I zipped his sleeping bag a bit snugger and I adjusted his pathetic, smelly, little pillow that had been found in a dumpster somewhere.

I took a swig from the nearly emptied bottle of liquor we'd been sharing, and soon I too was asleep: asleep among the raccoons, opossums, owls and skunks that ruled the night. I had in the back of my mind the ever-present fear that we would be found by a park ranger.

I awoke at first light and shivered in the frigid wind. My belly told me that I needed to go and find food. I checked on Sal to make sure he was okay. He mumbled a few words in his sleep and adjusted his position on the hard ground that was hardly softened by his worn-out sleeping bag.

I draped my blanket on top of him and walked to a spot ten meters away that we had designated for urinating. In the distance I could hear the traffic speeding on the interstate freeway. We were out in the middle of nowhere, and it would be very hard to find any kind of food. We had fled town when cops there had repeatedly bullied and attacked us. In this spot we would probably be left alone, but where was the food going to come from?

The nearest town was a six-mile walk, but I would have to go there. Attempting to kill some animal and cook it for food wasn't a practicable idea — we had no weapons for hunting or facilities for processing meat.

I reached town after a two-hour walk. I had left a note for Sal not to worry and saying I was coming back with food. The first thing I saw was a Wendy's. My wallet had ID but was devoid of cash. I approached a large man who was just leaving the restaurant with a giant bag of hamburgers.

"Please sir, if you could spare a dollar..." I begged. The man looked at me with disgust and continued on his way. I asked another, and finally scored enough to buy two hamburgers. I bought my food and started on the way back so that I could give Sal some breakfast. At least I hadn't had to resort to digging in the trash can for someone's discarded scraps.

Suddenly, an instinct told me I ought to look over my shoulder. I caught a glimpse of an approaching patrol car at a distance, and I hoped he hadn't spotted me. I broke into a run and located some shrubbery to hide behind.

It had been a shock to become homeless. I had come from a good family and had been classically educated. And then everything fell apart when I was accused of something I didn't do. In my trial, I was acquitted, but everyone in my small town was convinced of my guilt. And then, my family turned their backs on me.

When I began to pack up and move, a number of things had gone wrong at once. A criminal had gotten my account numbers and had emptied all of my bank accounts. I tried to go to the police and they wouldn't raise a finger to help. My bank did not acknowledge that it wasn't I who had taken the money.

With no money and no means of support, survival was suddenly something I couldn't take for granted. I resorted to begging by the side of the road. The knot in my stomach and the consciousness of doom weighed heavily upon me, and I felt like it was the end of the world. And it was, as far as I was concerned.

I got back to the encampment and saw that Sal was attempting to start a campfire. With no lighter fluid and no matches, starting a fire would be an impossible feat, unless you had the survival ability of a Neanderthal or an elite soldier.

Sal had done certain things correctly, such as isolating the fire area with rocks. He was trying to get some tiny sticks lit up, and this might have worked had there not been a strong cold wind.

I handed Sal one of the two hamburgers, and we both feasted on the food for a few minutes. The burger barely made a dent in my hunger, as I had barely eaten in the preceding week.

And then, Sal asked me, "What next?"

I replied that I did not know.

Another cold night was approaching. Sal and I had to share a sleeping bag to fend off some of the cold. I could hear coyotes howling in the distance, and the rustling of some nighttime creature nearby. I looked up and I saw the Milky Way.

I wondered if there were homeless people like me and Sal on planets that circled those stars. At that moment, I wished that I could will myself to go to some other planet, one that had kinder people living on it and where there was always enough to eat. Abruptly I realized Sal was awake.

"I can take you there," said Sal. "I am one of them."

Defending Our Freedom from Police State Abuses

Commentary by Jack Bragen

The Nazis were loyal to their leader and they adored him and his vision. Those who didn't love Adolf Hitler and his cause were terrified into silence.

It was suicide to speak out against the Nazi regime. Books were put into piles and set on fire. The government began to round up Jews, disabled people, gay people, people of different races and nationalities (non-Aryans in general), and any dissenters who had spoken out against their cause. It was a reign of terror.

But everyone knows all of this, except perhaps the Holocaust deniers, who assert that it never happened and that it was a mass hallucination. Recently, the sign at the entrance gate of Dachau concentration camp, which translated said, "Work Will Set You Free," was stolen. As more of the eyewitnesses of the Holocaust are dying from old age, the deniers apparently would like to eliminate the evidence.

Now, in the United States, we have police forces and courts who have formed their own agreement as to how things will run. Police have killed law-abiding citizens who have given no provocation. The courts are participants in this slaughter by virtue of inaction. The courts often have, in effect, given their seal of approval for police to kill citizens indiscriminately.

I have met people who worship authority. In their view, the police can do no wrong and those in authority can do no wrong. They think they have "nothing to hide" and do not object to being spied upon and controlled by this godly authority.

A strategy employed by our government, in cahoots with the mass media, is to maintain focus on enemies external to the United States. This distracts many who might be actively opposing our increasing oppression at home.

Perhaps one reason the courts and juries refuse to convict officers and sentence them to prison is that they would be hard to protect if they are jailed. Or, perhaps, the district attorneys and others in authority are wary of angering the police, since they rely so heavily on police to enact their orders and to keep them protected.

Yet, these explanations are not good enough, since our Constitution is supposed to ensure equal protection under the law. It seems that police and the courts no longer care about following the laws they are entrusted to enforce. Instead they are attempting to become a dictating force.

Too often, the police attempt to rule through fear. An overwhelming fear of crime and social disorder, and an unthinking desire for law and order, were exploited by the Nazis when they came into power. However, there are variations on the situation in present-day America and Germany in the 1930s, especially since the American middle class is accustomed to liberty and to not living in fear of our government.

My prediction is that things will become gradually more oppressive. There will likely not be an abrupt point where this repression will go far beyond what is acceptable, because the idea of those in power is to slip bits and pieces past us in the absence of one alarming violation of freedom or civil rights that would make people take notice and stand up.

The level of government-induced fear is gradually being raised. When things are done in bits and pieces over a longer timeframe, it prevents general alarm from taking hold — yet before we know it, we could be facing a police state.

Meanwhile, we are at the stage where police are being elevated above the law, and the courts have given them license to kill at whatever point they wish.

It frighteningly appears as though police collectively have formed their own brotherhood of some kind, in which they do not have to obey the laws that they were originally hired to enforce.

I have no intention of insulting or deriding police in general. If we didn't have them, we would be worse off. I have been helped by police many times in my life.

However, I have also seen the bad side of police. It can be terrifying to deal with an armed man or woman who has at his or her discretion the option of putting us in prison, or who could even beat or shoot us on the spot. If a person with that level of authority over us begins to violate the laws that they are sworn to uphold, we have a serious problem on our hands.

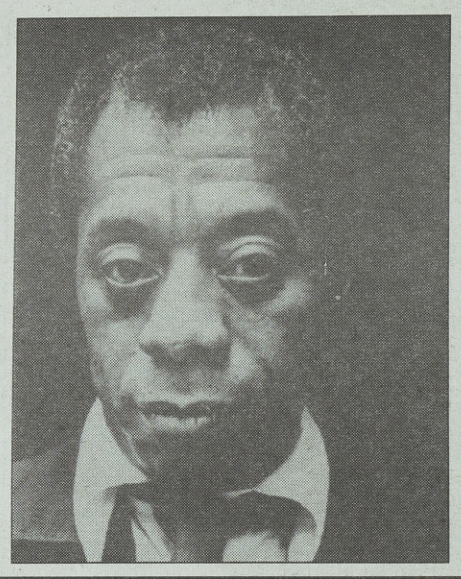
Clashes are increasingly taking place between police and demonstrators, and we have seen too many shootings by police of the innocent. The fact that some enraged citizens are attacking police doesn't help matters. This is only going to make tensions escalate, and police will become more extreme in their methodology. This in turn will only make more people angry at them.

When police stop obeying mayors, government officials, judges or even the president, then, at that point, we are looking at the end of democracy in its present form. The country could become a police state, or become degraded into chaos.

When citizens are fed up with errant police behavior to the extent that petitions are circulated for a new police reform act, we could see a change in how people are treated. We need to make the law enforcement branch of government accountable to citizens and to the law. At present, there appears to be little or no accountability. This is a hole in our Constitution, and in our democracy, that must be patched.

James Baldwin's Double

After the battle, Zane recovered in an Army hospital, but the guilt never left him. In his dreams, a bearded prophet denounces him: "That bullet had your name on it." The image of his friend Xavier was in his mind always and forever.



James Baldwin, author of The Fire Next Time and Notes of a Native Son.

Many veterans return home and end up living on the streets. Robert L. Terrell photo

Short story by George Wynn

In the garage, standing before his easel, 70-year-old Zane, with a full head of blond hair, paints the spaces on the canvas as slowly as he can and with meticulous care. He prefers the reds and blacks of the German expressionists.

It's important to him to get the sharp face just right. The portrait is almost finished, and reveals a black-skinned, lean, short man with big, bulging, penetrating eyes, a wide nose, big lips and sharply chiseled cheeks and chin — the kind of face that leads you to muse about what it would be to live inside his head.

The sharp face on the canvas stares back at him with a look as intense as Zane's sense of loss.

Just before he is about to apply the finishing touches at midnight, Zane's easel hits the ground and he falls asleep on his wide stool. He has visions of bats coming out of his skull, like the visionary Spanish painter Francisco Goya.

His medium-size garage has an almos t new, blue mattress, a stained pillow, two tattered crimson blankets and two old chairs, one stacked with art books from Titian to Pollack. The garage is equipped with an old furnace, water heater, rusty pipes, and a broken beam and cracks in the ground from the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989, with a mouse or two (or three or four) for company.

Zane sometimes feels like the protagonist living underground in Ralph Ellison's novel, *Invisible Man*.

Lasting images of the War

Upon waking, Zane, his cheeks and chin covered with stubble, rubs his eyes over and over. He's tired from all the heavy dream images night after night. His thoughts return again and again to his friend Xavier: It seems like yesterday forever.

His platoon gets lost in no man's land, walking the animal trails where the kids go to avoid the booby traps, but there are no kids around. Out of the blue come the N.V.R. (North Vietnamese Regulars). They're not V.C. They don't run. And it's a force twice as large as Zane's platoon of twelve.

Outnumbered, his platoon is on the defensive. In the first minutes as they exchange gunfire, Zane is shot in the chest. In a flash, Xavier shields Zane's blood-streaked body with his own, only to have a bullet explode in his head.

Zane recovers in a hospital in the Philippines, but ever afterwards, the guilt never leaves him — as well as the recurring dream of the white-haired, bearded prophet denouncing him: "That bullet had your name on it." His life is changed forever.

The Best of Friends

In the Army, he and Xavier became the best of friends. Ironically, both men were working-class guys from Milwaukee who'd never known each other back home. Xavier used to joke that people kept telling him he looked like the spitting image of the renowned novelist James Baldwin.

He recounted, "One day I was on a bus and it stopped in front of Marquette on Wisconsin Avenue and a student sat down next to me and asked me if I was James Baldwin. I said yes and he asked for my autograph. I signed 'James Baldwin' to his elation and firm handshake."

Xavier laughed at the memory, then he pulled out a newspaper photo of Baldwin and Zane was amazed at the resemblance.

When Zane returned stateside he had planned to visit Xavier's family on the North Side and relate the circumstances of their son's death, but he couldn't get himself to face them. He was ashamed to be alive instead of their son.

Stranger in a Strange Land

America was now distant to him. He lived in the Vietnam of his mind where he occupied a space akin to the title of one of James Baldwin's novels: *Another Country*.

Everything had changed. He used to be close to his father, Peter, a printer. There were only the two of them. His mother, Irene, had died of tuberculosis when Zane was three. He had only vague memories of her. But it was she, his father told him, who named him Zane because of his father's love since childhood for the western author Zane Grey, especially his *Riders of the Purple Sage* which Peter would still read over and over.

Seeing his father smack his Bazooka bubble gum while immersed in his reading inspired Zane to read, beginning with his love for fairy tales, then fiction and history. But he identified, not with the bookish types, but the shop guys, and shop classes were his favorites.

In high school, Zane sported a black leather jacket and a D.A. (Duck's Ass) hair style and drove a used candy-apple-red '57 Chevy that he bought with the money he earned as a page at the Main Library on Wisconsin Avenue.

He'd lost the swagger and self confidence he had as a teen. He used to be the life of the party, playing rock and roll standards on acoustic guitar. Now that he was back from the war, there were still days when he liked to talk sports with his father or tune into a ballgame. The Brewers were the new baseball team in Beer Town but Zane longed for the old hometown Milwaukee Braves and his favorite player, "Hammering" Henry Aaron.

Dreams and Depression

There were also those gloomy days after work in the Miller Beer brewery when he went straight to his room, turned off the lights, threw himself on the bed and fell asleep till morning. Zane was depressed. He'd learned about death and nothingness. He'd become philosophical without ever reading a single book on philosophy.

There were nights he was consumed by memories and wanted to block the whole world out and find relief from the pressure in his head. One night, he had a dream of seeing his own name on the casualty list. Upon waking, he stared into the mirror, shouting, "What the hell am I doing here?" and slammed his fist repeatedly into the bloodied, cracked mirror.

Peter drove him to the emergency room. Zane required lots of stitches in his hand and would have permanent scarring. A week later he left for the West Coast. He'd toughed it out in Milwaukee for several years but the Wolfean phrase, "You can't go home again" eventually proved true for Zane.

Upon arriving in San Francisco, he rented a cheap room in a hotel on Columbus Avenue in North Beach. He found himself with greased hands and overalls, working as a mechanic until the garage went under.

He learned he could earn money by taking jobs others didn't want, like tearing tile off floors of rundown houses being remodeled with a sledgehammer and coming home with swollen and numb veins in his forearms. After that temporary job ended, he was the only Anglo on a Mexican roofing crew. Then he landed a job as a baggage handler at the airport.

He still took no pleasure in life, but slowly he became friendly with women. But each time the relationship became serious, he would say, "You don't want to marry me." He didn't want to load his demons onto another human being.

When Zane suddenly got the news that his father had died of a coronary, he was crushed, and felt numb the entire flight back to Milwaukee for the funeral. When his father died, he felt lonely and vulnerable — no mother, no father, no siblings.

Zane missed the old man terribly. He remembered the good old days watching the Packers on T.V. with him on Sundays before he joined the service. He recalled their fishing trips up north on Saturdays.

Yet Zane had been like a stranger to Peter after he came home from the war. His father hadn't deserved that. They were different. His father was a calm man who didn't need to raise his voice to be firm, while Zane had changed from a happy-go-lucky kid to a temperamental ex-vet with on-and-off mood swings.

Locked up on a 5150

Now the corner bar became his refuge: a game of darts and then way too many whiskies. His spirits were low. Zane was tardy and absent once too often and finally got fired from his airport job.

One late night, the cops stopped Zane as he was walking and shaking his fist in the middle of heavy traffic on Broadway near City Lights Books. He started grumbling, saying he was tired of it all and would be better off doing himself in. They took him to a hospital where he was committed to a state hospital on a 5150, a 72-hour suicide hold, which turned out to be five days because weekends didn't count.

A spectacled science-fiction buff in the next bed cautioned him on the first day: "A word to the wise. Don't make trouble or they'll give you shock treatment."

Semi-zonked on 700 mg of Thorazine, Zane slept a lot and watched the black patients shoot pool and the white inmates sing along to British rock groups. There were 30 rows of beds horizontally lined up, five rows deep on each side of the men's hall, as well as the women's hall.

This is truly barracks living, thought Zane, except there were chains on the door. Peaches and franks without buns for lunch and dinner, and cereal and milk and two pieces of bread for breakfast. One night, the attendants rolled out a dolly with a big, big tray of liver. Only one fellow naked to the waist built like Hercules unchained beat Zane to the liver.

On Monday, just before midnight, he was awakened by the screams of a woman, "Let me go. Let me go!" She was being dragged through the men's ward by two burly attendants.

Startled, Zane barked, "What are they doing to her?"

Science-fiction buff snapped, "Shut up or they'll get us too," as they pushed the screaming woman through a big door.

At noon the next day, the ward psychologist, satisfied that Zane was no longer a threat to himself, allowed him to check himself out. He stood on the side of the road and caught a bus to the Greyhound Station on 7th and Market.

Down and Out on the Street

Zane, now attired in Dickie workpants and boots, got jobs from a labor pool installing doors in high rises. But it wasn't steady work and he was often unemployed throughout the next few years, unable to pay the rent and having to stay in shelters or camp out in parks or on the street. He'd applied for public housing but never heard back.

The older he got, the more he again felt the need for a drink, but he willed himself to resist the temptation to wallow in despair. Rather, he chose to use his time constructively. He spent hours upon hours in libraries studying art books and making pencil-and-pen sketches of street scenes. Soon he was doing portraits of tourists for donations of five or ten dollars, or even a twenty here and there.

Victoria, a friendly Latina lady and wharf artist who was forever knitting sweaters for the poor of Third World countries, gave Zane sweaters now and then, and introduced him to Gladys, a sickly, slender, bony lady who owned a small house on the edge of Chinatown/North Beach. The clinking of cable car bells could be heard in the distance.

Gladys needed someone to help her with shopping, do a little cooking and accompany her on her hospital visits in exchange for a space to stay in her garage. Zane jumped at the chance and immediately agreed to the barter.

Gladys was a quiet woman and not too demanding. She liked fried chicken with mashed potatoes and gravy, and so did Zane, so he cooked that dish several times

See **James Baldwin's Double** *page 11*

James Baldwin's Double

from page 10

a week. Gladys was happy with Zane who did everything asked of him.

He set up his art materials, and a strange feeling of confidence settled over him. Something now gripped him to portray his friend Xavier on the canvas. Zane became possessed with the painting. He was discovering the force of his passion and will.

One evening, Gladys invited him up to her small living room to share a box of See's chocolates she had received as a gift. After they delighted in their shared chocolates, Gladys stood up in front of her mantelpiece and stared at a black-and-white photograph in a gold frame.

She had told Zane how her son, a Marine, had perished in the Dominican Republic in 1964 from sniper fire on a street in Santo Domingo. She touched the photograph lightly. She held it tightly in her hands. She looked at the photo, repressing a smile, and he knew she had never stopped thinking of her son for even a solitary day — much like Xavier was in his mind always and forever.

He didn't know how to comfort her. All he could manage to say was, "Thank you for the chocolates. They were delicious."

"You're welcome, Zane." A tear or two welled up in the corner of her eye.

Meanwhile, something mysterious had happened with his portrait of Xavier. The paint had disappeared into the uniqueness of Xavier's face. It was done. Xavier's eyes, his nose — it was really him. He'd gotten it right after many a sleepless night in the basement. He was satisfied.

Zane showed his painting to Gladys. "It's wonderful," she said. "He must be a dear, dear friend."

Zane nodded. "He certainly, certainly was!"

That evening, Gladys gave him the money to buy a cake saying, "Let's celebrate the finishing of your painting."

Zane smiled and said, "Sounds good." He walked off briskly to a Stockton Street Italian bakery.

After they finished munching on cake and drinking the coffee Zane brewed, Gladys said, "I apologize for the mice downstairs."

"No harm done," said Zane. "I've had rats for company sleeping in more than one downtown alley."

She gave a slight grin, "I bet you have."

It was to be one of their last happy moments. Gladys grew weaker and weaker as the months passed. Once she received the diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, the disease overwhelmed her frail body. She passed on soon afterwards.

Her relatives were greedy for her property and ice cold towards Zane, and asked him to leave right away. He put his painting of Xavier and his other stuff in a South of Market storage facility.

Zane was forced to hit the shelters and lower Nob Hill alleyways for another round, but he took it all in stride. He had learned to be realistic about these sort of things and to take the good with the bad.

Two months later, when he went to his P.O. Box on Pine Street, he opened an official city letter notifying him of his acceptance for housing for veterans. He'd have a studio apartment of his own in less than three weeks.

Zane was elated. He'd finally found what he'd wanted. The portrait of Xavier would hang proudly on the wall of his new home.

The Mind's Current

by George Wynn

So much is unfolding in the mind's
current, who knows how
images will flow
in a poem?
or what directions
the lives of
characters will go
in a story?

Take a step
back in silence
observe how
a poem or story
is shaping itself

There often seems
to be at least
one surprise
and yet
one final obstacle
and after the
strain hopefully
a smile signifying
your vivid imagination
did it!

No Home to Return to

by George Wynn

San Francisco days
with alleyway flavors
hidden rats
and empty cigarette packs
trash eaters
and a 60-year-old
bare chested
bare footed
panhandler
with pockets and clothes
turned inside out
with pus infected feet
grabbing my spare
quarters screaming
"Look. I'm not
a monster!"

Family

by George Wynn

She has a long day
at the nursing home
for low pay.

She comes home
late at night
her father sleeps
on her couch.
She scolds him
for poor decisions.

Tomorrow
she will come
home and her
brother will
be sleeping
on her couch.
She will scold
him for poor
decisions.

The next
night she
will come home
and her sister
will be sleeping
on her couch.
She will scold
her for poor
decisions.

"My door
will always be
open to them,"
she cries.
"After all we're
family."

Hungry Pen

by George Wynn

Pen races across page
fills up empty space
when pen slows down
sometimes it happens

In Spite of the Differences

by George Wynn

A blue mood
consumes me
whenever
I eye his shoes

In the corner
of the garage
rest proud
a pair of wine
colored size seven
dress shoes
the ones
he stomped
his feet with
the last time
I saw him
and snapped
"You're a lousy son"
I could have
retorted
"You're a lousy father"

Long ago
I learned
to walk away
and I did
for twenty years

In the Fall
I removed
the wooden
shoe tree
from each
slightly
scuffed shoe

I thought
it best
to donate
put the shoes
in a bag
placed them
outside my door

When the truck came
I tore open the bag
removed the shoes

There they still rest
in the corner
so calm, so unlike him.

Down And Out San Francisco Teens

by George Wynn

Along the Embarcadero
tourists turn away
their eyes from outcast
sons and daughters
with outstretched hands
as if they were unclean.

Another day of
waiting and waiting
and bending their
heavy heads
as if in mourning.
"The locals are
not as mean"
two or three
tell me.

January Nights

by George Wynn

Way past my bedtime
I feel old and cozy
in my blue slippers
by the reading lamp
unable to take my
face out of another
exotic Somerset Maugham
story with an ending
that stuns and open
to interpretation
and a cure for
my loneliness (at
least for this night).

Innocent But Guilty

by Claire J. Baker

Let's face it, love,
now we're homeless!
Our debts from illness
took us down — way down!
No time to call for help.
We're less than a speck
from the moon or anywhere.
People don't care, they stare
at us in our chosen spot
for today. It's best, love,
that we move on, roam.
Yet always remember
that when both of us could
work, we had a HOME.

Driving in the Country

by Claire J. Baker

If we spot road-kill
we want to move
the injured creature
onto a softer bed —
pine needles or leaves,
provide a gentler
recovery, or passing;

make a small shrine,
circled pebbles,
a flower marker.

On the flip side,
what can we do when
we see an injured, ill,
or dying homeless person
on a tough city street?

Down to the Bones

by Carol Denney

it's hard to believe in the daytime
there where the brother was hit
shot like a dog by the dumpster
this was some serious shit
kissed by some fool with a shotgun
arguing over some buy
people just act like it's natural
everyone wants to get high

***chorus:* everyone wants to get high**
everyone wants to get high
people just act like it's natural
everyone wants to get high

right near the dollar store entrance
right behind Everett and Jones
eaten alive by the hunger
neighborhood down to the bones
everyone hopes they'll get lucky
the next score might be the one
death doesn't wait 'til you're ready
just for some fool with a gun

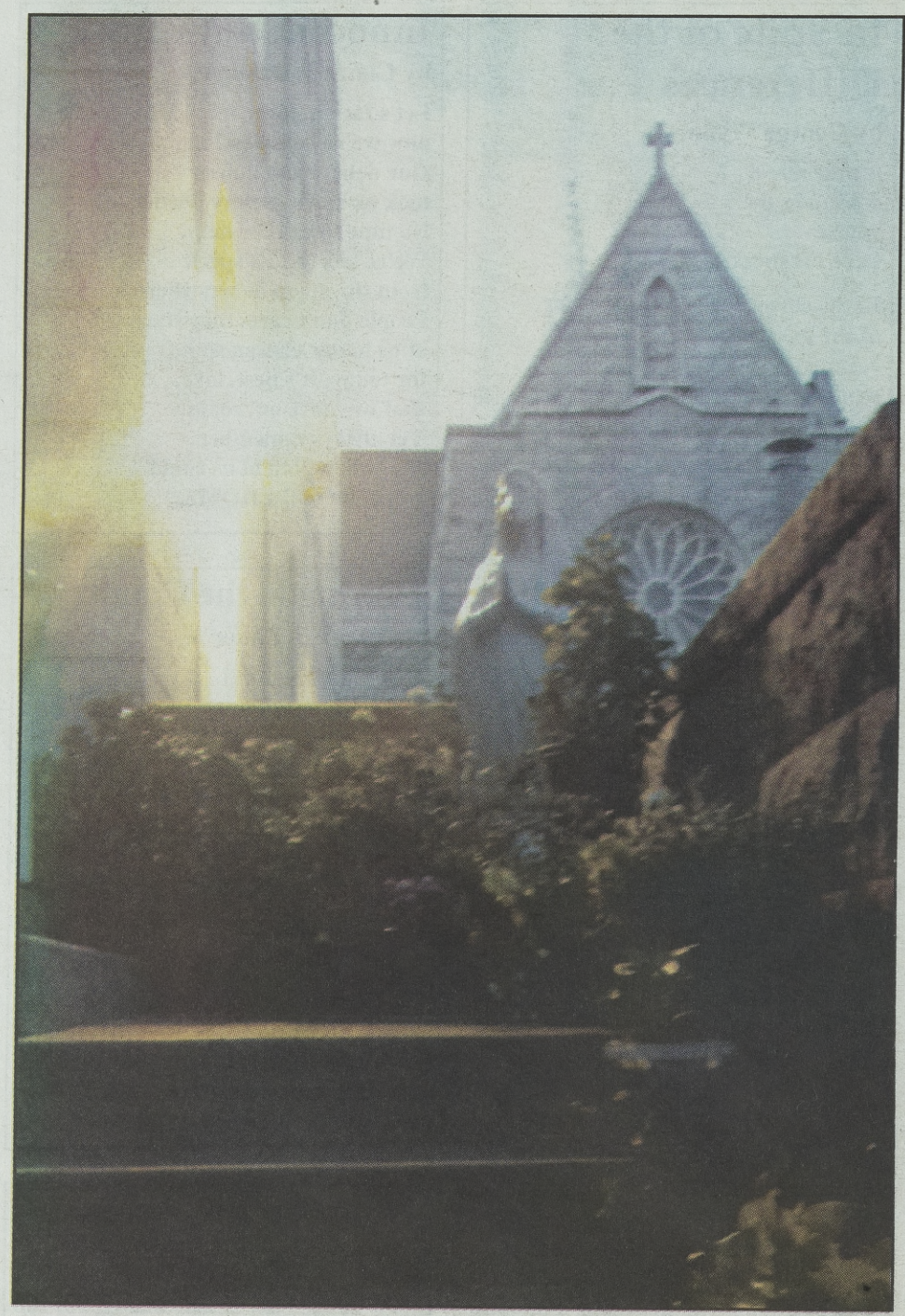
***chorus:* everyone wants to get high**
everyone wants to get high
people just act like it's natural
everyone wants to get high

bouquets of needles and empties
halos of gulls in the sky
three murders ring Forty Acres
people have stopped asking why
three murders ring Forty Acres
nobody's dropping a dime
three murders ring Forty Acres
four's just a matter of time

down here the dreams look like ashes
there ain't no dog in this fight
it doesn't end like a movie
nobody's making this right
nobody knows when it's over
they don't know when it began
they'll think they finally got steady
then they'll be back here again

***chorus:* everyone wants to get high**
everyone wants to get high
people just act like it's natural
everyone wants to get high

The author writes: "I wrote these verses after the murder right across the street from me. It's very dark but it's real."



Judy Jones took this photograph of Mother Teresa's Chapel in San Francisco. She writes: "In the picture I took, Angelic Supernatural Light flows from it! Her tiny chapels go beyond race religions age time location ... Unconditional love and Thanksgiving for our breath of life!"

THE GIFT

by Peter Marin

Inside,
the world deepens
into whatever remains,
filled with light. The garden
is almost still, gently
moved by a breeze
from the past. The leaves
tremble, waver, become
the faces of gone friends.
I have grown old at this desk,
writing poems no-one
will read. What of it?
The gifts we are given
are no more and no less
than flowers they spread
at the feet of a Buddha. Petals
dry into dust. The green stalks
turn brown. Plenitude is
still the word I would use,
here at this happy ending.

Gentler Universes

by Peter Marin

Wife's dead of cancer,
years ago. I do
whatever a man does,
construction, paint, break stones,
rake leaves — muscle and sweat,
thirty bucks a day. Hate shelters,
live in a cave, dug it myself above
the beach, on the cliffs, timbers
for shoring, candles inside,
dry as a bone even in rain,
reading sci-fi until midnight, then
dreaming, stoned, curled like a baby,
of alien planets, gentler universes,
empty skies stretched
beyond all believing.

Bits of Heaven

by Peter Marin

Ride the buses all night
rolling one end of town to the other,
up Santa Monica, down Hollywood,
turn around at the depot, back again.
Sometimes they don't pick me up,
doors kept shut, wait
an hour for another, passes me
by again. Fog drifts in, cold, sea-mist,
buses, lit bright, rolling by,
warm bits of heaven won't let me in.
Mornings, done, get my tea at six,
kill time till the library opens,
read until closing, midnight
again on the benches in the dark,
the night an ocean closing around me,
the wheeled blue whales of light
my answered or unanswered prayers.

THE DAWN

by Peter Marin

The wind
comes up, the frame
of the day is set to trembling,
bits of the garden appear,
behind them, a darkness,
below them, an abyss.
Slowly, the light in its circuit
emerges from the trees, the leaves,
the buds out of emptiness
becoming the world. I
watch as always, astonished,
thinking my thoughts, in
the kitchen, at my desk, drinking
my coffee, beginning
another day. Is there
a greater gift? What is it
fills my flesh? My wife
is sleeping upstairs. So
many years! And the light,
brighter now, opens
into all that remains.

HERE

by Peter Marin

We are here
at the end, riding the last
wave of Creation. Write it on a sign
and I will carry it through
the boulevards, wild-eyed
but clear-headed, remembering
these things: deserts, the edges
of jungles, the high Peruvian
plateau where I sat, waiting
with rebels for whatever
would come. There is no
way to wake and find
the garden intact, the oaks
re-greened, the pines free
of beetles and disease. Everything
I love is slowly fading away
into the haze of a future
I will not be in. The blue
of the sky fills me with sorrow
and the seas in my dreams
break on deserted shores. I
watch from the late stages
of my life, building a ship
out of words -- to what end?
Now for the street, to carry
my sign, crying out the end
is nigh! Not what I imagined,
a boy in Brooklyn, thinking
the world would be mine.

baby bros gone

by Judy Joy Jones

sippin' my morn brew
when
medical examiner
gave me a ring

we have your
baby bros remains
and callin' to inform you

my blood curdling screams
opened heaven's doors
sendin' healing angels
to my side

may my
weary soul's tears
open hardened hearts
to feel

wallow in life
hug until you
can hug no mo
give like
you never did before

make each soul
you meet
believe they are
god's finest masterpiece

luv like each second's
your last

morrows not promised
you know
and only our love remains
only our love remains
only our luv remains

little bro
i luv you

Ark of Loneliness

New York

by Peter Marin

Filing in, one by one,
as if into an ark
of loneliness, out of the rain
the shelter, its gray
emptiness anchored
at the bottom by green cots
arranged in rows, boots
tucked under, men asleep,
rocked on the surface
of watery dreams by a
great storm never to end.

Tenderloin

by Jan Steckel

You savor T-bone. Poodle wolfs ground kidneys.
Panting muzzle, lolling tongue longer
than life. Hunger's hot breath.
You can hardly bear the dog's eyes.
How will you carry your rare steak past
the woman who sleeps under the overpass?

The Coming of Winter

by Adam Allen

People are looking over their shoulders
as fall comes nearer its dry end.
What comes has little to recommend
itself to those who wish to grow no colder.

The earth glides off along the ecliptic
caring not for things left undone.
She has no thoughts of replenishing the fund
of hope to fulfill mortal longings that still itch.

Yet still her children plod along
into the bleak of the approaching season.
They, like their mother, offer up no reason,
but their blood pumps to face the coming throng.

Reflecting Pool

by Adam Allen

Reflecting on the past cannot show the future.

The image is a false god revealing nothing new.

Fragments of a life once lived cast a long shadow.

But that black specter seemingly ahead

is as thin as snow hiding the surface of a long road.

The past is compacted and resorted in memory

like compost that once comprised the dazzling shades of autumn.

To worship at this altar is to fall into the reflecting pool.

And the hazard of drowning within an inch of water

is a danger as pervasive as has confronted man from his beginning.

The light glimmering on the surface of the pool is really the vital now.

The bridge between its shimmers and the future lives only in the mind of man.

The conjuring of the beholder will bestow no truth not immediately at hand.

Revelation only occurs when the onlooker ceases in his reserve

and reaches out his hand to touch the shining surface of what is.